

Swain-Macy House
99 Main Street
Nantucket
Nantucket County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-944

HABS
MASS
10-NANT
59-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

SWAIN-MACY HOUSE

HABS
MASS
10-NANT
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Location: 99 Main Street (on north side), Nantucket,
Massachusetts

Present Owner: Jacqueline Harris (Mrs. Julian Harris)

Present Occupant: Mrs. Harris

Present Use: Residence

Brief Statement
of Significance: Typical of the way many Nantucket houses grew,
the Swain-Macy house began as a small eighteenth
century lean-to house and then was enlarged and
remodeled with Federal details in the prosperous
whaling days of the 1830's.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The house is of two parts, east and west. The east part was owned by Valentine Swain in 1770 and at that time was a Nantucket half-house, i.e. a three-bay front lean-to type with end chimney. It is quite possible that it was already on the land when he bought it, or that it was moved there from some other locality.

In 1823 Zenas Coffin took a mortgage on the property and three years later Valentine and Mary Swain deeded to him "our dwelling house in Nantucket" -- deed was not recorded until June 6, 1828. Zenas Coffin died July 6, 1828 without a will, and in the partition of his estate the property at 99 Main Street was granted to his son-in-law and daughter, Thomas and Eunice Macy. Eunice died in 1843 and the property stayed in ownership of Thomas Macy and his descendants for over a century, passing from him to his son by a previous marriage, Philip Macy, who lived in the house most of his life. After his death, his daughter Miss Mary Eliza Macy occupied it for many years, bequeathing it to a relative, Mrs. Ella H. Still, who owned it in 1940. On her death it went to Mrs. Still's daughters (great-granddaughters of Thomas Macy), Mrs. Francis L. Biggs and Mrs. N. Lester Troast. They deeded the property to Mrs. Charles S. Todd, who owned it but a short time, deeding it in 1947 to Mrs. Jacqueline Harris, the present owner.

1770 -- Valentine Swain
1828 -- Zenas Coffin
1828 -- Eunice and Thomas Macy
1843 -- Thomas Macy
Philip Macy, his son
Mary Eliza Macy, Philip's daughter
1931 -- Ella H. Still
-- Mrs. Biggs and Mrs. Troast
1945 -- Flora K. Todd (Mrs. Charles S. Todd)
1947 to date -- Jacqueline Harris (Mrs. Julian Harris)
Abstract, Records Registry Deeds, Nantucket, Mass.)

2. Date of erection: East part 1770. Believed to have been built prior to that date either on the site or moved there from another location -- cannot be determined. West part, 1830. (Abstracts, Ninety-Five Percent Perfect by Crosby, The Coffin Sage by Gardner.)
3. Architect: Unknown. Probably planned by Thomas Macy. (See elaborate plan he recorded in 1831 in Book of Deeds, Nantucket Registry of Deeds.)
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: See Book of Deeds, 1831, Nantucket Registry of Deeds.
The house as owned by Valentine Swain was a little three-bay house with door on the left and two windows on the right. It had hand-fashioned timbers, joists and wide floor boards and exposed corner posts, summer beams and wall plates. This section extends from the east wall westerly about twenty-seven feet.
5. Alterations and additions: An interesting detail of the old timbering of the first floor in the old part is that the large front to rear timber, the next one to the old west sill, has been moved some six feet to the west to within two feet of the old west wall and longer, mill-made joists inserted. It is judged that this was done to support the heavy bearing partition which is superimposed on this beam and extends up through two stories. This is the partition on the west side of the main entrance hall. An imposing staircase was added and then two new bays to the west of the door. The result was a five-bay house with a two-story facade and in the center a graceful front stoop leading to a broad doorway beneath a green fan. The trim of this reconstructed part is more embellished than the simple Colonial or Quaker design. The rear ell is older than the reconstructed part but probably not as early as the old house.

The main two-and-a-half story wood, gable roof building has a basement throughout with stone foundation walls topped above grade with brick. The south, front, facade is about forty-one feet long with entrance door at center. The main building has a depth of about thirty-six feet

front to rear. The west fourteen feet of this building and from foundation to roof is definitely an addition of later date as well as the chimney therein with interior trim and finish. (Abstracts, Manuscript Writings, Everett Crosby, in possession of Mrs. Marie M. Coffin.)

The house, a combination of Quaker plainness and the refined opulence of the whaling days, has a considerable air of dignity about it. The rooms are excellently proportioned, and the hallway and front staircase are in keeping with this atmosphere. This staircase is perhaps the most beautiful feature of this lovely house, the doorway of which, with its delicately carved fan, is not to be duplicated anywhere.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: In 1824, Thomas Macy, Quaker, a prominent man in town affairs as well as Postmaster, married Eunice, daughter of Zenas Coffin, the whale-oil merchant and one of the wealthiest men in the state at that time. It was Zenas Coffin's custom to endow each of his daughters with a house upon her marriage, and the property at 99 Main Street was purchased for Eunice.

Thomas Macy was the son of Obed Macy, the historian. It is known that Thomas Macy once presented a volume of Obed Macy's History of Nantucket to Herman Melville and so it is probable that he entertained the famous author of Moby Dick when he visited Nantucket in 1852.

Two of Thomas Macy's best investments were in voyages of well known whaleships, the Potomac and the Mohawk.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: Photograph, Early Dwellings of Nantucket, White Pine Series, 1971; drawing, The Far-Away Island, by William Stevens, New York: Dodd Mead, 1941; reproduction of painting by Edgar W. Jenney (showing dining-room), on 1940 calendar of Island Service Co., Nantucket, Mass.

2. Bibliography:

Fowlkes, George Allen. A Mirror of Nantucket, an Architectural History of the Island, 1686-1850. New Jersey: Press of Interstate, 1959. (includes two photographs)

Gardner, William Edward. The Coffin Saga. Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1949. (includes photograph)

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin
Nantucket, Massachusetts
July, 1965

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Typical early nineteenth century Nantucket house, part moved from Sherburne to its present site, enlarged and remodeled in the Federal style; full basement, two-story with two-story ell, gable roof with roof walk, wood balustrades at Main Street eave; excellent doorway.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent; minor and tasteful modification.

B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 41'-7 1/2" by 60'-7" including ell.
2. Foundations: Rubble stone walls under 1770 house partly reworked with brick walls and piers; brick walls and piers under 1830 portion.
- 3/ Wall construction: Shingles painted white, 5"-6" average exposed, except Main Street which is clapboard 3 1/2" average exposure painted white; 5 3/8" corner boards with 3/4" bead; horizontal sheathing exposed in garret.
4. Structural system: Wood frame, probably braced and platform, post and lintel, not revealed at time of survey except in east rooms second floor where corner posts, girts and summer beams are exposed; hewn beams and joists, milled beams and joists in first floor framing.
5. Chimneys: Two brick chimneys with five flues each, corbelled caps painted red and reworked, stucco covering below roof line; east chimney reworked; both chimneys corbelled to meet gables.
6. Stoops:
 - a. Wood stoop at Main Street entrance; wood floor, steps, bench at each side of doorway, square newels with caps, cylindrical balusters, hand-rail circular in section with flat at bottom continuous in fence.
 - b. Stone stoop at north entrance.
 - c. Brick terrace and steps off ell entrance.
 - d. Wood steps at northwest corner, greenhouse at entrance off hall and kitchen.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Main Street entrance: Six-panel

door, side lights of four panes each, reeded pilasters, flat molded wood cornice, overdoor of louvered fan with eagle at center; disc fascia decoration, cavetta and round molding in surround; operating louvered shutters at each side light. All other doorways and doors are modern.

- b. Windows: Six-over-six, twelve-over-twelve, eight-over-eight single hung windows, thin muntins and sash; mortise and tenon, dowel fasteners in window frames; operating louvered wood shutters one and/or two per opening, cast iron pintels and hinges; interior shutters, two paneled sheaths each side, fold into reveals of principal windows.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape and covering: Gable roof, light green asphalt shingles over sheathing paralleling slope of roof and nailed to purlins.
- b. Framing: Five major bays, west bay divided by additional rafters, mortise and tenon with treenails and nail fasteners.
- c. Cornice and eaves: Cornice of Main Street elevation has boxed eaves, stepped fascia, brackets, wood gutters and downspouts with sheet metal necking, cornice returns in adjacent elevations.
- d. Balustrade at Main Street elevation composed of a sequence of recessed panels and turned half-balusters.
- e. Roofwalk: Wood, surrounds chimneys at ridge of main gable, spiral newels, balusters and handrail; scuttle in north slope.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: Entrance and stairhall, parlor and dining-room at each side; rear stairhall with kitchen, ell living-room and sitting-room, exit to greenhouse and north yard.
- b. Basement: Full basement under 1770 house and ell, crawl space to the west; stairway from rear stair hall.
- c. Second floor: Stairhall, two bedrooms each side, bathrooms replace central chimney fireplaces; three bedrooms and bath in upper part of ell.
- d. Garret: Unfinished except for west end.

2. Stairway:

- a. Main stairway: "L"-shaped stairway, 11" treads, 8 1/4" risers, rectangular balusters, round hand-rail flat on bottom, turned and carved spiral and floriated newel at base of stairway.
 - b. Rear stair: Modern
 - c. Stairway to garret: Straight run.
 - d. "L"-shaped ladder to scuttle and roof walk.
3. Flooring: Wood boards, some painted dark green with floral pattern or varnish finish, cut nails, boards average 1" by 6-20".
 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster painted and papered, paneling and wainscot in some rooms.
 5. Doorways and doors: Classic trim, some doorways have fixed transoms; two six-panel doors, some glazed.
 6. Decorative features and trim: Typical Nantucket house noted for its simplicity with decoration limited to paneling, stairways and fireplace decoration; exposed structural elements are beaded or beveled; cabinet in parlor fireplace wall.
 7. Notable hardware: None except for "H" hinges, iron thumb latches.
 8. Lighting: Modern electric.
 9. Heating: Oil-fired hot water system; fireplaces in all major rooms, classic trim, remains of early warm-air gravity system.

- D. Site and Surroundings: The Thomas Macy house faces south on Main Street. To the east are the "Three Bricks" (MASS-941) built by John Starbuck for his three sons; wood fences and green areas front and rear, walkways at each side provide privacy; informal boxwood garden, maple and elm trees are principal landscape material.

Prepared by F. Blair Reeves, AIA
Nantucket, Massachusetts
September, 1969.

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey project on Nantucket, Massachusetts. They are part of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Architectural description was provided by Professor F. Blair Reeves, A.I.A. (University of Florida). Photographs are by Jack E. Boucher, of Linwood, New Jersey, and Cortlandt V. D. Hubbard of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, August 1971.